

OUTGOING MESSAGE

Approved For Release 2004/11/30 : CIA-RDP78S01932A000100210027-6

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DATE-TIME GROUP

CIA/OCE / WHIZWH 740205

CITE

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ITEM NO: 04-04

DATE: 5 FEB 74

SUBJECT: WRAP-UP ON SPRATLYS

AN EXCHANGE OF FOREIGN MINISTRY STATEMENTS BY PEKING AND SAIGON OVER CONFLICTING CLAIMS TO THE SPRATLY ISLANDS IS KEEPING TENSIONS HIGH OVER THE ISSUE. WHILE BOTH COUNTRIES HAVE REAFFIRMED THEIR SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE ISLAND GROUPINGS, THE CHINESE EMPLOYED CONSIDERABLY TOUGHER LANGUAGE THAN THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE. PEKING ISSUED ITS PROTEST IN RESPONSE TO THE ARRIVAL OF VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS ON SEVERAL UNOCCUPIED ISLANDS IN THE SPRATLYS. TERMING SAIGON'S MOVE A "NEW PROVOCATION", CHINA DECLARED IT "WILL NOT TOLERATE" THIS "INFRINGEMENT" ON ITS TERRITORY.

THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE STATEMENT, WHICH WAS IN RESPONSE TO

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PEKING'S, WAS DECIDELY DEFENSIVE IN TONE AND DECLARED THAT THE VIETNAMESE ACTION WAS NOT A PROVOCATION AGAINST MANY COUNTRY. EARLIER THIS WEEK SAIGON SENT A SMALL NAVAL TASK FORCE TO OCCUPY FIVE ADDITIONAL ISLANDS IN THE SPRATLYS.

COMBINED WITH THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS WHO HAVE BEEN GARRISONED FOR MANY YEARS ON NANYIT ISLAND, SAIGON CLAIMS A TOTAL OF 300 SOLDIERS IN THE SPRATLYS. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, SOUTH VIETNAMESE COMMANDERS STATE THAT THEY ARE SENDING MORE REINFORCEMENTS TO THE SPRATLYS. CHINA HAS NO FORCES IN THE ISLAND GROUPING AND HAS NOT PATROLLED THE AREA. BOTH THE NATIONALIST CHINESE AND THE PHILIPPINES, WHO ALSO CLAIM THE SPRATLYS, HAVE HAD TROOPS STATIONED ON SEVERAL ATOLLS FOR SOME TIME.

ALTHOUGH A FORCEFUL REACTION BY THE CHINESE CANNOT BE RULED OUT, THERE ARE NO SIGNS OF PREPARATION FOR SUCH ACTION. A MILITARY RIPOSE WOULD PRESENT COMPLICATED DIPLOMATIC AND

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LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS FOR PEKING. CHINA WANTS TO AVOID A CLASH WITH TAIPEI SINCE THIS RUNS THE RISK OF INVOLVING THE US AND DISRUPTING RELATIONS WITH CHINA'S NEIGHBORS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. TROUBLE WITH MANILA WOULD ALSO UPSET THE COUNTRIES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA. MILITARILY THE ISLANDS ARE BEYOND THE RANGE OF CHINESE COMMUNIST FIGHTER COVER AND AT THE EXTREME RANGE OF TACTICAL BOMBERS FROM HAINAN. PEKING WOULD ALSO HAVE DIFFICULTY MAINTAINING NAVAL FORCES IN ACTION IN THE ARCHIPELAGO.

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